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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, we dodged a few more bullets over the past week. Plenty of snow all around us, but next to nothing here. Heavy winds and torrential rains, we got all that and then some. The major flooding alerts were everywhere, including one of the rivers in my town. So far, our area hasn’t been affected in any way in that regard.

It’s been another long week; and I don’t know where the time has gone. I’m exhausted, and just can’t seem to get the right kind of rest when I need it. I hate wasting one of my couple of days off during the weekend trying to catch up on sleep, but sometimes you have to do what’s right for yourself. But, not this weekend!

More news regarding that Pennsylvania school system and its alleged spying on some students via their laptop webcams. It’s simply amazing, and now it’s made national headlines. There are a couple of more articles regarding this story in this week’s issue. And you can be sure that this story will continue to unfold. It will be interesting to follow, and see what comes out of this issue. The free notebook computers for students is an excellent program; and I hope that this particular problem doesn’t have an adverse effect on programs like this throughout the country!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and I’ve gotten a couple of emails about a couple of previous columns. Specifically, some of the things I’ve said about global warming and health care. I thought it might be worth taking some time to talk a little bit more about both this week.

First of all, a couple of people wrote (in rather mocking tones, I might add) about my mentions of global warming and the amount of snow we’ve

received this winter. How could it be, they asked, that it’s getting warmer and warmer and yet snow so much?

It’s a good question. I remember when I was a kid and hoping against hope that we’d get enough snow to have a day off from school. My father would look at the outside thermometer and say, "No, it’s too cold to snow." Usually, we wouldn’t get snow, but not because of the temperature. It was because there just weren’t any storms, not because it was too cold. Nonetheless, it seemed that my father was right and that it hadn’t snowed because it was too cold. It was counter-intuitive, but I ’saw’ the evidence of it right there in front of me... it must be valid, right?

And that’s kind of like what’s happening now. We get snow, and people figure that it’s because it’s cold... not TOO cold, but cold enough for snow. Well guess what? It’s FEBRUARY! It’s SUPPOSED to be cold!

The more germane point is that there’s more moisture in the atmosphere available to condense out as snow. But why is there more moisture available? There are probably at least two reasons: Because the oceans are warmer, and the air currents are a bit different now.

Warmer ocean water allows more moisture to be absorbed by the air. That moisture-laden air gets carried over land by the currents in the atmosphere, where it cools and the moisture condenses out as rain or snow. If it’s cold enough, it’s snow. And ’cold enough’ is a relative thing too. Aside from it having to be below 32 degrees (0 Celsius), it doesn’t matter how cold. The fact is that it’s usually a good deal colder than that in the atmosphere where snow begins.

It just came out that last month was the warmest January on record. That’s not data manipulation or a "science trick", it’s fact. This is is the warmest January since they’ve been keeping track.

There are some... regional variations, of course. Some places in Europe are having a colder-than-normal winter. But the general trend and the worldwide average is warmer.

There are also two icebergs that are floating of the coast of Antarctica that are just plain huge. One is the size of Rhode Island. The other is bigger than that even.

Now, there are icebergs in the antarctic all the time. That’s nothing new. But these suckers are HUGE. Imagine a piece of ice in that glass of Kool-Aid the deniers keep drinking. In order for the proportions to be right, you’d have to be a frozen molecule of water on the surface of the ice cube. We just can’t imagine that. So maybe it’s better to imagine yourself as your real size, standing on an ice cube the size of Rhode Island. If I remember correctly, as a bit of unnecessary trivia, that’s about 700 billion tons of water tied up in a big block of ice. Yeah, that’s right... BILLION. That’s enough water to supply more than 20 percent of the world’s population with water for a year. Imagine it.. if you could sell that water in chunks of a ton for just a dollar each, we’d be able to keep a large portion of the people now struggling with drought AND make a very tidy profit.

But back to reality. It’s true that icebergs melt, that they eventually disappear. But the problem is that something of this size (remember the old adage that 90% of an iceberg is below the surface of the water?) can actually divert ocean currents if it gets into the ’stream’. Those currents deliver oxygen and minerals from the ice that’s always slipping

into the ocean from the antarctic shelf and carry all that good stuff throughout the world’s oceans. Less oxygen, less animal life. Less animal life, less ’bounty’ for us.

And while that’s all taking place in the southern hemisphere, the North pole needs some consideration too... more and more of it is melting. So what, right? Well, dark ocean water absorbs heat from the sun. Ice reflects it. Less ice, more energy poured into the northern ocean. More energy in the northern waters means more opposition to the southern currents. That means that all that good stuff from Antarctica never makes it up our way. That means the oceans fundamentally change. Who knows what kind of "snowball effect" we could see from there? Not I, I assure you, but I’d rather avoid finding out if you don’t mind.

Okay, let’s take a quick look at health care. One of the largest health care insurance companies in the world is all set to increase rates by forty percent. FORTY PERCENT! So if you live in California, and your health care insurance through this company is costing you $100 a week, it’s going to cost you $140 a week next year. And this is despite the fact that actual health care costs (not health care INSURANCE costs) have only gone up by FOUR percent.

The president held his health care summit yesterday and the results were quite predictable. That pouty sprayed-on-tan looking sonofagun kept saying that people should decide on medical issues instead of government, and the president kept explaining (as if to a slow child) that no one was talking about the government deciding. Then you’ve got wackos like Ginny Foxx and Michele Bachmann talking trash and raising fears about things that simply don’t exist. And the house minority leader sitting there like a scavenger, waiting to pick up any bloody pieces left over, and you’ve got a real beltway standoff.

The democrats are finally making noises like the Republicans did several terms ago, threatening a "nuclear option", and it’s about damned time. The conservatives have had plenty of time to come up with something to add and really haven’t, other than their love letter to the insurance and drug companies. Now they’re saying "let’s start over"? Why? Put something on the table instead of trying to push stuff off of it.

What I fear is that the liberals in the House and Senate lack the spine to follow through on anything for fear of losing their own government-backed health care insurance.

I still say that a major part of the problem is that the nature of health care has changed and we’re still trying to treat it the same old way. It just won’t work. And simply mandating that everyone HAS to have insurance isn’t the answer either. We need bold new ideas, not more accounting tricks. Make it worthwhile for companies to charge less. Give them incentives, double tax credits for charitable donations of equipment and support to public hospitals and clinics, make it worth their while to do the right thing. The are corporations. Profit is their life’s blood. Let them do well without having to siphon it out of the rest of us. It’s the same for the drug companies. Cap their profits. Let them decide whether they get the multi-million dollar bonuses or keep their precious companies (and the public) healthy.

And patients and doctors are going to have to make do with less as well if we’re going to make anything work. Patients are going to have to content themselves with paying for office visits and small stuff. Doctors are going to have to content themselves with smaller fees, which we can

help them with by keeping their malpractice insurance more affordable. What we cannot do is keep people with legitimate grievances from seeking compensation and support. Tort reform sounds great until you realize that it’s usually the legitimate grievances that get kicked aside because it’s the illegitimate ones that don’t follow the rules in the first place.

Well, I’ve probably ticked off enough people for this week. [grin]

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - A New Zelda for the Wii?
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Nintendo DSi XL Next Month!
Missile Command Turns 30!
And more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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A New Zelda for Wii in Second Half of 2010?

We have 2010 release dates for Mario Galaxy 2 and Metroid: Other M, but could the next Zelda be on its way this year, too? A new Mario, Metroid, and Zelda, all in the same 365-day timespan? Xbox and PS3s sacrificed, Italian plumbers and koopa troopas living together...mass *euphoria*?

Chatting with Wired, Nintendo America VP of marketing and sales Cammie Dunaway may have let the cat out of the bag. Wired apparently bet Nintendo wouldn’t release Mario, Metroid, and Zelda all in the same year.

During the interview Wired asked Dunaway if it owed her a steak dinner for betting incorrectly, to which Dunaway replied "I think you do."

And then she more or less confirms Zelda’s in part of a 2010 triple-header here:

"One of the things that’s true for Nintendo is that we’re not driven by a calendar for our release dates. When the games are ready to go, when the quality is perfect, that’s when we release. We all benefit if we can keep a pretty steady pace, so the development teams have worked hard to make sure that we’ve got a full lineup this year. If you compare the first half of 2010 with the first half of 2009, it’s night and day. And from some of the things that Mr. Iwata has talked about, and that we

will talk about at E3, like Zelda, you know that we're going to have a good back half of the year, as well."

Look for Zelda to feature prominently at E3, and release during the second half of 2010, in other words.

Assuming Mario Galaxy 2's more challenging than its breezy predecessor, Metroid's hybrid platform/shooter gameplay clicks, and Zelda's more than just another Ocarina of Time riff, Nintendo might win more than sales accolades for a change. Still, it's disappointing to see Nintendo power-marketing the same old franchises to the same old fans.

Where's whatever comes after Mario or Metroid or Zelda, guys? I've been asking this for years now: What's *next*?

Are so-called 'hardcore' Nintendo fans stuck playing Mario-Metroid-Zelda "rhapsodies on a theme from Miyamoto" indefinitely?

Nintendo DSi XL To Launch March 28

Nintendo plans to launch the latest version of its popular handheld video game system, the DSi XL, on March 28 in North America.

The XL will cost $190. It will have two screens like its predecessors, but as the name suggests, the device and screens will be much larger than the currently available versions. The XL is already available in Japan.

Nintendo Co. also says it's launching "Super Mario Galaxy 2" for the Wii console on May 23 and "Metroid: Other M" on June 27.

In addition, Nintendo will sell e-books, namely "100 Classic Books," for the DS portable devices for $20. The 100 works will include pieces from such authors as William Shakespeare, Jules Verne, Jane Austen and Mark Twain. "100 Classic Books" launches June 14.

Atari Celebrates the 30th Anniversary of Legendary Videogame Sensation With the Return of Missile Command

Atari Inc., one of the world's most recognized videogame publishers, is bringing back a franchise that helped catapult the company into an international household name with the 30th anniversary edition of Missile Command. The new version has been updated and reimagined by OMGPOP, operator of the omgpop.com website. Housed in a mini-site dedicated to the game, the remixed Missile Command captures the original iconic DNA of the 1980's phenomenon, and adds compelling new dimensions and attitude - highlighted by the entirely online multiplayer gameplay, a first for the franchise. Missile Command is free to play and available at www.missilecommand.com, www.atari.com/missilecommand and www.omgpop.com/games/missilecommand.

The year was 1980 and all across the planet people had the very real fear that one day the world's super powers would finally use their nuclear arsenals. Missile Command was in many ways a reaction to those fears. The

premise of the game was simple: the player must protect six cities from an ever increasing swarm of ballistic missiles. Control was taken care of by a fast and accurate trackball that was notorious for pinching the skin of players' fingers. That didn't seem to affect the public appeal of the game which became an immediate arcade smash hit and one of the biggest sellers of the Atari 2600 system.

Now Atari and OMGPOP have built upon that legacy with this exciting online version. With enhanced features such as power-ups, new enemies, upgrades, and an entirely online multiplayer co-operative gameplay option, the new Missile Command has all the makings of a modern classic.

"Missile Command is a pop culture phenomenon that millions upon millions of fans have enjoyed throughout the years," says Jim Wilson, President and CEO of Atari, Inc. "The new Missile Command maintains the appeal of the original while bringing it to today's casual and social game players. It is an example of how Atari's games portfolio is well positioned for today's growing online games market."

"Working with Atari was terrific," says OMGPOP CEO Dan Porter. "To be able to work on a classic that many of us grew up playing and add the social and multiplayer features was a great way to bring the game to the millions of teens on omgpop.com."

Missile Command on Atari.com boasts thrilling new gameplay such as:

* Online Co-op Gameplay - play instantly with up to seven-players in real-time
* Unlimited Levels - play with increasing challenge as you progress
* Unique Difficulty Scaling - difficulty scales based on number of players and level progression into the game
* Power-ups - all new power upgrades help players increase blast radius, missile speed, reload rates, missile supply and more
* Enemies - take on massive waves of enemy missiles, aircrafts and bosses with varying speeds, health, behavior and characteristics
* Award Systems - Medals awarded to top players in each round and a leaderboard support system to track players and friends with most medals

Fans who visit www.missilecommand.com can immerse themselves in the game's heritage by comparing the OMGPOP remix to the original 1980 release, also playable on the site. In addition, to celebrate the game's place in gaming history, Atari has created a retrospective charting the evolution of the game from its coin-op origins with original cabinet images, box art, screenshots and trivia.

There is also the opportunity to win a rare, refurbished original Missile Command coin-op cabinet from the 1980s. For more information and details on how to enter the sweepstakes please visit www.missilecommand.com.

For more information on the new Missile Command, please visit www.atari.com.

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Atari Shops Missile Command Film Rights

Atari wants to bring the enduring missile-commanding thrills of Missile Command to the big screen with a feature film adaptation of its classic arcade hit.

According to a Los Angeles Times blog report, Atari is in talks with numerous studios, but Fox and Chernin Productions - a production company recently founded by former Fox Entertainment CEO Peter Chernin - are the front-runners to distribute and produce the project.

Created by Dave Theurer and released in 1980, Missile Command became an arcade sensation, and has since been ported to innumerable platforms. Another Atari arcade all-star, Asteroids, was released one year earlier - and its film rights were signed by Universal last year.

If this trend of 30-year Atari arcade game film option gestation continues, it is possible next year will see a major Hollywood player acquire the movie rights to Donna Bailey’s Centipede or another Dave Theurer hit, Tempest.

Steven Spielberg, a film director, is pictured above next to a Missile Command cabinet. He has not been reported to be involved with the Missile Command movie project.

Missile Command, which depicts the inexorable and simultaneous siege of six cities, was partially born out of Cold War fears of nuclear holocaust. Theurer, who worked long hours and lived near a NASA facility that frequently conducted loud aeronautics testing, suffered nightmares during development of the game.

Theurer’s original premise for the game had its six besieged metropolises representing the Californian cities San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Eureka, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara. Atari’s official canon, however, revised the plot to center around an invasion of the planet Zardon - "the last of the peaceful planets" - by the forces of the planet Krytol - whose citizens are "warriors out to destroy and seize."

It is unclear which take on the Missile Command saga Atari hopes to depict on the silver screen.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

New Clues Uncovered In Google Hack

Investigators have reportedly identified the author of the malicious code

used in recent cyberattacks against Google and more than 30 other U.S. companies. The person responsible for the code that capitalized on a weakness in Internet Explorer is a "freelance security consultant in his 30s," according to the Financial Times. The FT asserts that investigators this recent discovery makes it "far harder for the Chinese government to deny involvement."

The unnamed author of the malicious code reportedly posted a sample of his work to an online forum, and that Chinese authorities had "special access" to his work. It is not clear whether the government discovered his work as a result of his forum posting, or what kind of "special access" Chinese officials had to this code.

Despite being responsible for finding the exploit used in the attack, however, the FT says the consultant was not a part of the operation.

The FT report comes on the heels of last week’s assertion by The New York Times that the attacks were traced back to two Chinese schools: Shanghai Jiaotong University and the Lanxiang Vocational School. Both institutions have denied involvement, according to Chinese state media.

The entire incident, however, raised international concerns and prompted Google to threaten to shut its China operations, citing frustration with both the security issues and the Chinese government’s ongoing demands for censorship of search results.

While investigators have been making headway in discovering important clues about the recent cyber attacks, the investigation may not get much further without Chinese involvement. Security expert O. Sami Saydjari told The New York Times on Sunday that without cooperation from the Chinese, investigators will be unable to discover who was truly behind the attacks.

Experts Say US Must Do More To Secure the Internet

The government must take a more active role in securing the Internet, industry experts told Congress Tuesday, arguing that as businesses and governments rely more on cyberspace the prospect of a serious attack grows.

Comparing the digital age to the dawn of automobiles, analysts said more government regulations may be the only way to force the public and private sectors to adequately counter cyber threats. They compared the need for new oversight to regulations for seat belts and safety equipment that made the highways safer.

At stake is the need to secure the financial and power systems vital to national security and daily life without choking off business innovation and competition. President Barack Obama declared cybersecurity a major priority early last year, but his administration struggled to make progress, not naming a new cyber coordinator until December.

"Cyber has become so important to the lives of our citizens and the functioning of our economy that gone are the days when Silicon Valley could say hands off to a government role," Michael McConnell, former director of national intelligence, told the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

The panel has been trying for the past year to draft legislation that would map out a way the government and private industry could work together to protect critical computer networks, set industry standards and promote more high-tech education and public awareness.

The calls for more government authority over the Internet’s free enterprise has alarmed privacy advocates and other critics, forcing Congress to grasp for ways to encourage rather than mandate better online security.

Now on their fourth major draft, committee leaders have struggled to overcome protests from industry leaders and private groups who say the government should provide financial and other incentives, but stay away from regulation that might constrain the electronic age.

McConnell and others, however, warned that cyber attacks are already siphoning millions of dollars out of the economy and that critical networks that run the power grid, transportation lines, and nuclear safeguards are all vulnerable to "hacktivists" aimed at striking America.

U.S. computer networks - from the Defense Department to small companies - are scanned and probed millions of times a day. The assaults range from small time hackers looking to steal credit card data to nation states and terror groups aimed at espionage or disrupting vital computer systems.

The days of the Internet Wild West are over, said James Lewis, a cybersecurity expert and senior fellow at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"Just as cars were not built to be safe until government pressure changed auto manufacturers’ behavior, cyberspace will not be secure until government forces improvement," he said.

Lewis said increased security will require new standards and rules for industry, international agreements, and new ways to improve the education and professionalism of those working on the networks.

Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., chairman of the committee, said the government must work with the private sector, because neither can do it alone. He noted that private industry owns or controls roughly 85 percent of computer networks, and said companies meeting with the committee have balked at greater government control.

The Senate bill, drafted by Rockefeller and Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, also would raise the White House cyber adviser to a Cabinet-level position that would need Senate confirmation.

Microsoft Uses Legal System to Combat Botnet

Microsoft moved the battle against spam-distributing botnets from cyberspace to the court room, winning a temporary restraining order shutting down nearly 300 domains thought to make up the command and control structure for the vast Waledac botnet.

The restraining order was granted by a US federal judge in secret - a

critical element of Microsoft’s plan, dubbed ’Operation b49’. By shutting down the command and control domains for Waledac without alerting the bad guys first, Microsoft was able to essentially decapitate the botnet - severing the compromised bots from the brains of the operation.

Botnets have grown to be one of the biggest online threats currently.

Estimates suggest that tens of millions of PC’s around the world are compromised by some bot malware, and are lying dormant awaiting instructions from the botherder - the person behind the botnet.

There are some who question whether the legal system is an effective tool against botnets, or whether Operation b49 has any hope of long term success.

Randy Abrams, director of technical education for ESET, is not one of those people. "This is wonderful! This causes more work for the gang which means it costs them more to commit their crimes."

"Any action against botnets is a good thing," agrees Qualys CTO Wolfgang Kandek.

I agree that any action against a botnet is a good thing, but the primary goal behind Microsoft’s innovative two-pronged attack to shut down Waledac was to cut off a major source of spam. Qualys’ Kandek says that Operation b49 will have some impact on spam, but that "Waledac is not one of the major spam sources."

"The real measurement is not how much spam this reduces, but rather if this type of action becomes another tool to combat the problem," suggests Abrams. "The more approaches that can effectively be used, the better the war can be fought. This may well be a step toward an effective blended attack against botnets."

Generally speaking, laws themselves are not a deterrent for cyber-attacks or malware. Those who execute attacks and develop malware already know they’re breaking the law, and obviously don’t care. If they had a moral compass and ethical framework to comply with the laws, they wouldn’t be creating botnets to begin with.

This is a different sort of approach though. Microsoft didn’t seek to criminally charge the botnet developer, or sue for damages in civil court. It sought an ex parte restraining order to shut down the operation from within.

Randy Abrams explains "Court orders are one attack vector. I think this is an important development and may be used more frequently, it isn’t a panacea, but it is a weapon that causes disruption and helps in the battle."

Court orders are a viable method of combating botnets according to Kandek as well. "Yes, but we are still in the early stages to see what legal methods apply and how legislation will have to be adapted to the new realities of the international operations of botnet operators."

There are pros and cons to Microsoft’s approach with Operation b49, but doing something is better than doing nothing, and you have to start somewhere.

Abrams notes "The pro is that it exposes a flank of the enemy. The con

is that going through courts can be time consuming. There may be ways to streamline the process going forward and Microsoft has the legal resources to do this well."

"There are no botnet nukes. Fundamentally such a weapon would have unacceptable collateral damage. This is a battle that will require an extensive arsenal of conventional weapons and innovative strategies. Trial and error will be part of the process. Court orders and domain take downs are essential weapons to have in the arsenal," concludes Abrams.

Kandek sums up "I only see positive effects, we need better publicity on botnet penetration and the damages associated with it."

Italy Convicts 3 Google Execs in Abuse Video Case

An Italian court convicted three Google executives of privacy violations Wednesday because they did not act quickly enough to remove an online video that showed sadistic teen bullies pummeling and mocking an autistic boy.

The case was being closely watched around the world due to its implications for Internet freedom.

In the first such criminal trial of its kind, Judge Oscar Magi sentenced the three in absentia to a six-month suspended sentence and absolved them of defamation charges. A fourth defendant, charged only with defamation, was acquitted.

"We will appeal this astonishing decision," Google spokesman Bill Echikson said at the courthouse. "We are deeply troubled by this decision. It attacks the principles of freedom on which the Internet was built."

Those convicted were Google’s global privacy counsel Peter Fleischer, its senior vice president and chief legal officer David Drummond and retired chief financial officer George Reyes. Senior product marketing manager Arvind Desikan, based in London, was acquitted. All four had denied wrongdoing.

"The judge has decided I’m primarily responsible for the actions of some teenagers who uploaded a reprehensible video to Google video," Fleischer, who is based in Paris, said in a statement.

He noted with irony that he was convicted for privacy violations despite devoting his career to "preserving and protecting personal privacy rights."

Drummond said he was "outraged" that he was found criminally responsible for the video, noting that both European Union and Italian law recognized that Internet service providers like Google are not required to monitor content that they host.

"This verdict sets a dangerous precedent," Drummond said in a statement. "(It also) imperils the powerful tool that an open and free Internet has become for social advocacy and change."

In the United States, the Communications Decency Act of 1996 generally gives Internet service providers immunity in cases like this, but no such protections exist in Europe.

The verdict could help define whether the Internet in Italy - and perhaps beyond - is an open, self-regulating platform or if content must be better monitored for abusive material. It comes as Google already is facing regulatory challenges in Italy, where a draft bill would require Internet sites to control content the same way television stations do. Google has lobbied for changes to the bill.

Google, based in Mountain View, California, had called the trial a threat to freedom on the Internet because it could force providers to attempt an impossible task - prescreening the thousands of hours of footage uploaded every day onto sites like YouTube.

Prosecutors had insisted the case wasn't about censorship but about balancing the freedom of expression with the rights of an individual.

Prosecutor Alfredo Robledo said he was satisfied with the decision because it upheld the principal of privacy and put the rights of the individual ahead of those of a business. It could force Google, and any other hosting platform, to better monitor its video, he added.

"This is the big principal affirmed by this verdict," Robledo said. "It is fundamental, because identity is a primary good. If we give that up, anything can happen and that is not OK."

The charges were sought by Vivi Down, an advocacy group for people with Down syndrome, even though the boy does not have the syndrome. The group alerted prosecutors to the 2006 video showing an autistic student in Turin being pushed, pummeled with items, and insulted by bullies at school, who called him a "mongoloid" in a mock telephone call to Vivi Down.

"Unfortunately, in Italy, the term 'mongoloid' is used as an insult, which we don't like," Edoardo Censi, president of Vivi Down, said outside the courtroom. "Our problem is the defense of our children, of the disabled ... when we learned of the video, our first concern was to remove it."

Google Italy, which is based in Milan, said it took down the video two hours after being notified by police, as is required by law. Prosecutors argued that viewers had flagged it well before police contacted Google, and the fact that it shot to the top of a "most entertaining videos" list on the Italian site, had 5,500 views and 800 comments during the two months it was online meant it should have been noticed sooner.

Thanks to the footage and Google's cooperation, the four bullies were identified and sentenced by a juvenile court to community service. The events shortly preceded Google's 2006 acquisition of YouTube.

In another setback Wednesday for Google, the European Commission in Brussels said it had asked Google to comment on allegations by rivals that it demotes their sites in its search rankings.

EU spokeswoman Amelia Torres declined to name the three rivals and stressed that the EU hadn't yet opened a formal investigation.

Google said it would provide "feedback and additional information on these complaints," but stressed it was not violating any EU antitrust rules. It said those complaining were Foundem, a British price comparison site, the French legal search engine ejustice.fr and Microsoft Corp's Ciao! from

Bing.

The low rankings complaint is significant because high rankings in Google searches drive higher volumes of traffic to Web sites.

British Politicians Fall Victim to Twitter Scam

British politicians were among those caught up Friday in the latest Twitter-based scam which hijacks users' accounts to send out sexually explicit messages to friends and followers.

The micro-blogging Web site has seen hit by a wave of so-called "phishing scams," which lure users to a bogus Web site where they're enticed to part with their passwords. The compromised accounts are then used to distribute rogue messages to other users.

Those tracking the Twitter account of Ed Miliband, the British energy minister, were surprised by a message carrying an unusually direct reference to the politician's sex life.

"Oh dear it seems like I've fallen victim to twitter's latest 'phishing' scam," Miliband said in a message posted shortly afterward.

He wasn't alone.

On Thursday, House of Commons leader Harriet Harman told lawmakers her account had sent a bogus message to opposition lawmaker Alan Duncan.

She didn't say exactly what the content of the message was, but she left British lawmakers wondering when she told them: "I wouldn't ever send a tweet like that."

Other prominent politicians and journalists were among those who received the rogue messages.

Even tech-savvy Twitter users have been hit.

Intel UK, the British arm of the chip maker, apologized to its followers Thursday after saying its account had been hacked.

So too was the account of prominent tech blogger Cory Doctorow, who blamed the small screen on his phone for falling victim to the scam.

Lenovo Introduces ThinkPad X201 Tablet

Lenovo on Tuesday introduced ThinkPad ultraportable laptops, including a tablet, which the company said enterprises prefer over the new breed of keyboardless tablets, which are also called slates.

The ThinkPad X201 Tablet has a 12.1-inch screen and runs on Intel Core i7 processors, the company said. The laptop has a traditional convertible tablet design, with a keyboard, and a touch screen that can be rotated and placed on top of the keyboard to record data.

There is growing momentum behind a new generation of tablets, also called slates by PC makers, which are handheld devices on which users can browse the Internet, play games, read e-books and view video content. Slates usually have software-based on-screen keyboards.

Slates have promise in the consumer segment, but have limited functionality that could restrict their use in enterprises, said Mika Majapuro, senior product marketing manager at Lenovo. While the convertible-tablet market is small, enterprise users need laptops for more than viewing content.

"There are not many customers who are willing to give up their keyboards," Majapuro said. Convertible designs also have larger screens and offer the flexibility for enterprises to run more software, Majapuro said.

Lenovo has, however, moved ahead with a slate product in the consumer space. Lenovo earlier this year launched the IdeaPad U1 Hybrid, a laptop that includes a detachable touch screen. The screen turns into a tablet on which users can surf the Web, play games or read e-books. The U1 Hybrid will cost about US$1,000.

IBM came out with the first tablet in a slate form in the early 1990s, said David Hill, vice president of brand management and design at Lenovo. That slate was developed for insurance companies to carry out certain tasks, but the design was ultimately carried over to the new ThinkPad clamshell laptops, Hill said.

"We've learned in a business situation - there's a large desire to marry tablet function with rich content creation," Hill said. The tablet balances the slate functionality of viewing rich content, while providing a keyboard to create documents.

If the U1 Hybrid takes off with consumers, similar designs for tablet PCs with detachable screens could make their way into the enterprise,Hill said. But advances need to be made in developing strong on-screen keyboards. Corporate buyers were initially skeptical about technologies like CD drives in laptops when they first came out, but these became popular after the technology took off in the consumer space, Hill said.

The X201 Tablet will come with the Windows 7 or Windows XP operating system. It will include hard drive storage of up to 500GB or SSD storage of up to 128GB. Integrated wireless connectivity options include Wi-Fi, WiMax and Bluetooth. It will weigh 3.57 pounds (1.62 kilograms) with a 4-cell battery and 3.95 pounds with an 8-cell battery. Pricing for the laptop starts at $1,549. The company didn't comment on worldwide availability.

The company also announced the new ThinkPad X201 and X201S laptops, which are priced starting at $1,199 and $1,599, respectively, company officials said. Based on Intel's Core i5 and Core i7 processors, the laptops include 12.1-inch screens and a runtime of up to 12.2 hours on 9-cell batteries.

SanDisk Ships $350 64GB SD Card

Flash memory maker SanDisk released its highest ever capacity SD memory card this Monday. The new SanDisk Ultra SDXC has a massive 64GB capacity, and although not the first SD card to boast such high-capacities, the company claims that its new card is ideal for a wide range of demanding portable gadgets.

The exFAT-formatted memory card can read data at a 15MB-per-second rate, and according to SanDisk, it’s enough sotrage for eight hours of high-defnition video. However, don’t jump for your wallet just yet, as the new high-capacity card is priced at a hefty $349.99.

If the price hasn’t put you off, then compatibility issues might: The 64GB card is an SDXC card based on the SD 3.0 specification, so in order to make use of SanDisk’s latest you will need a recently released SD 3.0 capable device.

The new 64GB SanDisk Ultra SDXC card is available now for $349.99, with an included lifetime warranty, from SanDisk.com.

Lawyers Due in Pennsylvania Court in School Webcam Spy Case

Lawyers for a suburban Philadelphia school district accused of spying on students via their school-issued webcams are due in court.

A federal judge is being asked Monday to stop officials of the Lower Merion School District from removing any information from the 2,300 laptops issued to high school students.

A lawyer pursuing a potential class-action suit against the district says he needs to preserve evidence on the computers.

The FBI is investigating whether the district broke federal wiretap and computer use laws.

The district says it activated the webcams to find more than 40 missing student computers. Officials say they have now abandoned the practice.

District lawyer Henry E. Hockeimer Jr. says people should not jump to conclusions about the case.

Pennsylvania Educator Says She Didn’t Watch Student Webcams

A Pennsylvania educator named in a webcam spying lawsuit says she never monitored students through webcams or authorized anyone else to do so.

Harriton High School vice principal Lynn Matsko responded to last week’s lawsuit through a statement Wednesday. She did not take questions.

She did not address a lawsuit’s accusation that she talked to a student about "improper behavior" at home, citing images from his school-issued laptop’s camera.

The student, Blake Robbins, says that the Lower Merion School District photographed him in his bedroom.

District officials have said they remotely activated webcams to locate 42 missing laptops without notifying students. Robbins’ lawyers asked again Wednesday for all the photographs and screenshots the district obtained.

Facebook Error Sends E-Mails To Wrong Friends

Facebook made a grave error this week when it sent users' e-mails to the wrong friends. Users affected by the mixup weren't able to access the site for a period of time.

Facebook moved quickly in trying to figure out how users' e-mails could have been redirected. The Palo Alto, Calif.-based social network also quickly apologized to users for any inconvenience.

"During our regular code push early Wednesday evening, a bug caused some misrouting to a small number of users for a short period of time," Facebook's Kathleen Loughlin said. "Our engineers diagnosed the problem moments after it began and worked diligently to get everything back in its rightful place."

Facebook wouldn't say how many of its 350 million users were affected. "We are still investigating and the information we are sharing right now is limited," Loughlin said.

Details about what kind of content was in the redirected e-mails was also not being shared. One user reported receiving more than 100 e-mails intended for other Facebook users.

Before Facebook's error, the Electronic Privacy Information Center, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit research center, warned the Federal Trade Commission of ongoing privacy risks associated with social networking. Early this year, EPIC filed complaints against Facebook on some of its privacy practices and pointed to some risks associated with cloud computing.

Facebook users can post messages to their friends' walls that can be seen by others if the user receiving the message hasn't blocked them. Users' comments about photos and other posts are also often made available for others to see. Sending e-mails from one friend to another, however, was supposed to be the most private way of reaching out and communicating with friends.

E-mailed content is not meant to be seen by anyone other than the recipient. The only time more than one person can read an e-mail is when the e-mail is sent to a group.

Facebook said it takes several steps to provide privacy. Information is kept on a secured server behind a firewall, according to the company. More sensitive information, including credit-card numbers and passwords, is encrypted using Secure Socket Layer (SSL) technology. The company also uses automated measures to enhance security such as analyzing accounts for anomalous behavior and removes inappropriate content or links to illegal content.

While Facebook might offer its users several layers of security, it doesn't guarantee 100 percent security, according to the company. Facebook states on its web site that users take their own risk of information being shared when they create an account.

"Although we allow you to set privacy options that limit access to your

information, please be aware that no security measures are perfect or impenetrable," Facebook’s privacy page says.

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